

VZCZCXRO9324
PP RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHNP RUEHROV RUEHSL RUEHSR
DE RUEHAK #1384/01 2611644
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 181644Z SEP 09
FM AMEMBASSY ANKARA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0820
INFO RUCNMUC/EU CANDIDATE STATES COLLECTIVE
RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 6289
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC//J-3/J-5//
RUEILB/NCTC WASHINGTON DC
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC
RUETIAA/NSACSS FT GEORGE G MEADE MD
RUEHAK/TSR ANKARA TU

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001384

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT ALSO FOR EUR/SE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/18/2019

TAGS: [OSCE](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY: CHP OF TWO MINDS ON THE KURDS

REF: ANKARA 1339

Classified By: POL Counselor Daniel O'Grady, for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Turkey's main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) is torn on the issue of Kurdish rights. Although the party's leadership has been making harsh, uncompromising comments concerning the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government's nascent democratic initiative, many of CHP's lower-level officials, some of whom are Kurds or represent largely Kurdish constituencies, argue that the party can only remain relevant by embracing Turkey's ethnic minorities. Chairman Deniz Baykal stands in the gap and could well choose to lead his party in either direction. End SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) CHP leaders, such as Onur Oymen and Onder Sav, have reacted negatively to the concept of a "democracy initiative" currently being discussed and formed by the AKP in consultation with a myriad of political, social, and economic actors. Although the details of the project are unclear (REFTEL) and the government has not yet met with CHP to discuss it formally, the project's point person, Interior Minister Besir Atalay, has stated to the press that it would aim to eliminate the systemic discrimination displayed by the Turkish state against Kurds and Kurdishness by loosening restrictions on all citizens and conducting investment in impoverished areas. The CHP criticisms focus on a set of redlines. In its view, Turkey's sovereignty and secular nature are paramount; any law that runs the risk of individuals conspiring to gain regional autonomy on ethnic grounds, or that reduces the influence of Turkish as the language of the state, or negotiates in any way with the terrorist PKK (thereby rewarding individuals resorting to violence to squeeze concessions from the state) is absolutely unacceptable. The issue of an amnesty for PKK members remains contentious -- it must be crafted in such a way, the CHP argues, as to not give the impression that the state is conceding to terrorism.

¶3. (C) CHP's staunchly critical public persona, however, obscures an internal debate that cuts to the core of CHP's ideology. CHP Deputy Secretaries General Mesut Deger and Sinan Yerlikaya -- both Kurds from southeastern provinces -- bemoan the fact that CHP once was the party of choice for many Kurds because it championed precisely the policies that are today being discussed by AKP, but now struggles to win even five percent of the vote in Kurdish populated areas. Deger told us he was writing a report on the Kurdish issue arguing that CHP should participate in the AKP's democratic initiative, supporting laws that do not cross CHP's redlines

and working with AKP to rewrite those that do. Deger claimed to have support from the party's rank and file -- particularly in the southeast where party representatives argue CHP has lost its former voter base to the AKP -- and argues that both Turkey and CHP have much to win from a successful rapprochement with the Kurds.

¶4. (C) Yerlikaya produced for us a summary of a report -- presumably Deger's -- and enumerated each of the items CHP would want to see in a settlement with the Kurds: use of "mother tongues" in daily and political life; freedom of private citizens to publish, perform, and broadcast in all languages; state investment in the Southeast; investment incentives for private companies in the Southeast; democratization of local administrations; and the end to the village guard system. Yerlikaya lamented that before this report, he could only tell Kurdish voters to be patient with the CHP. Armed with the report, he now can show that CHP is looking out for their interests as much as AKP. Yerlikaya predicted that, if what is circulating in the press reflects the internal debate in AKP, there will actually be very little difference between CHP and AKP when Parliament reconvenes. Both men were dismayed that a small group of hard-line nationalists are causing friction in the party over the issue. Deger claimed that Onder Sav told him he was building his own coffin by preparing the report, and that he and his wife were receiving disturbing anonymous letters and phone calls. However, he affirmed he would continue to argue that CHP should "do the right thing" in working with AKP.

¶5. (C) Non-Kurdish voices are also sounding constructive on

ANKARA 00001384 002 OF 002

the democratization initiative, at least in private. Both Deputy Group Chairmen Kemal Kilicdaroglu and Hakki Suha Okay, though firm on the negotiation and mother-tongue education redlines, were guardedly optimistic that CHP and AKP would be able to work together on the project. Okay, armed with the same report Yerlikaya shared with us, argued that CHP is very much in line with the intellectual mainstream on the initiative. He marveled at headlines proclaiming "CHP support" for these proposals as if it were a surprise, saying that many of the ideas floating in the press first entered public debate in CHP reports in the 1990s. He also emphasized that only a handful of CHP members are allowed to speak for the party, and that comments by others should be interpreted as personal views.

¶6. (C) COMMENT: The harsh CHP rhetoric surrounding the democratic initiative may be disposable. Most CHP criticisms start with the caveat (usually delivered as an accusation) that AKP has not made any details available to them. Armed with a self-generated report that may largely jibe with what AKP eventually proposes, CHP would have the political room to step back from its harsher criticisms and then negotiate details from a position of strength. The fact that Hakki Suha Okay not only had the new CHP report, but also was trumpeting it to us, argues that its content is sanctioned by the party's most senior leadership. The tacit acceptance of the Turkish military -- which emphasizes similar redlines to those demarcated by the CHP, but which has been working with the AKP since the first announcement of the plan -- also could allay the fears of the most nationalist wing of the CHP, allowing Chairman Baykal some maneuverability. Nonetheless, Baykal has protected his position as party chairman in large part by placing a coterie of loyalists in the party's highest positions. If the eventual AKP proposals are not convincing or cross too many redlines, Baykal may not feel secure enough in his position to engage with the AKP on these crucial details.

JEFFREY

"Visit Ankara's Classified Web Site at <http://www.intelink.sgov.gov/wiki/Portal:Turkey>"